From Third-Class to World-Class Citizens : Claiming Belonging, Countering Betrayal in the Margins of Ahmedabad

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From Third-Class to World-Class Citizens: Claiming Belonging, Countering Betrayal in the Margins of Ahmedabad[1]

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Abstract

This paper ethnographically explores the repercussions of the large-scale displacement and resettlement of slum-dwellers in the city of Ahmedabad, India, where state-sponsored urban development aimed at the creation of a slum-free world-class city is strongly personified around the figure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Based on ten months' fieldwork in the slum resettlement site of Sadbhavna Nagar in 2015–2016, I explore the intricacies of betrayal resulting from world-class city making. First, I suggest that infrastructure interventions and futuristic imaginaries invoked dreams of a better future among the poor, but resulted in a sense of having been betrayed by both Modi and the state when people were physically and discursively excluded from the world-class city. Second, I demonstrate how resettled people have engaged in micro-level practices of betrayal by mobilizing middle-class "nuisance talk" (Ghertner 2012) to denigrate their new, unwanted neighbors. I argue that the perceived betrayal by the state trickles down and translates into a betrayal of neighbors in the resettlement site, reinforcing the pre-existing inequalities of caste and religion among the urban poor [Displacement; Urban Development; World-Class City; Resettlement; India].

> He [Modi] threw us here. Everyone thought he'd do good for Gujarat, he was supposed to do good for the poor, but for your [foreigners'] riverfront,[2] he divided us [into different resettlement sites]. He took the land and wasted money on it. And now look how things are going there [at the riverfront]. Boys and girls sitting... A garden... Hotels... He did good work. But as a result, we were divided, we were given houses here, in a jungle. If decent houses had been built there [by the river], one room would have been enough for us. Just one room, no more than that. (Chandikaben,[3] displaced from the Sabarmati Riverfront)

Introduction

The monolithic architecture of the seven slum resettlement sites located in the industrial neighborhood of Vatva stems from the city planning department of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). The unpainted concrete blocks, bounded by a low wall with only a few entrances, stand in orderly straight lines reaching toward the horizon. At first sight, the blocks all look identical, but a closer look reveals walls painted in pastel shades, religious flags fluttering on roofs and hanging from windows, and handmade grilles with intricate designs installed on balconies. Between the blocks, men and women sell fish, vegetables, *pani puri* snacks, *sharbat* drinks, bangles, and used clothes from pushcarts, slowly moving around the concrete labyrinth. The Narol-Vatva Road, with its intermittent stream of bicycles, motorcycles, and ramshackle trucks, functions as a border between the two largest resettlement sites, colloquially known as "Hindustan" and "Pakistan." A small police station stands by the road, often surrounded by idle-looking men. Over the main entrance of Hindustan, an official sign informs visitors: "Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation's urban poor housing program: Sadbhavna Nagar, Ambika Tube, Vatva."

In 2005, the Government of India declared Ahmedabad—the most populous city of the Gujarat State—to be a "mega city." The mega city tag elevated Ahmedabad to join the company of New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, and Hyderabad, and entitled the city to financial assistance for aesthetic improvements under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JnNURM), the central government's city modernization scheme (Desai 2012a; Shatkin 2014). The declaration also provided an opportunity for the elites and the middle classes to realize their goals regarding the future of Ahmedabad (Desai 2012a; Mehta 2016). An initiative arose to advocate an image of Ahmedabad as a

global city of business and tourism, and to abolish "outsider perceptions" of Ahmedabad as a violent city—an understanding spurred, in particular, by the 2002 Hindu–Muslim violence in Gujarat (Desai 2012a).[4] Government officials, business elites, and middle-class citizens aspired to transform Ahmedabad into a world-class city, the defining characteristics of which can be summed up as "a modern skyline, a high level of efficiency, and an absence of visible signs of poverty" (Ahoobim, Goldman, and Mahajan 2014). Becoming a world-class city included forced evictions and demolitions of slums to acquire prime land for development purposes (Shatkin 2014). Urban development projects of the 2000s—particularly the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project (SRDP), the Kankaria Lakefront Development Project (KLDP), and the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) project—figured importantly in physically reshaping Ahmedabad into a global city of business and tourism. Slum-dwellers, for their part, were resettled into four-story concrete apartment blocks, mostly built on the outskirts of the city.

This paper examines Ahmedabad's world-class city interventions and imaginaries from the perspective of the displaced and resettled slum-dwellers. It explores how inequality is reproduced through state-led neoliberal urban development and micro-level discursive practices. Invoking the notion of betrayal, I suggest that world-class city interventions resulted in a perceived betrayal by the state, and that in the aftermath of resettlement, the poor themselves came to betray their new, unwanted neighbors in claiming moral worth and a positive self-understanding. I argue that this manifests in how betrayal by the state trickles down and affects social relationships at the micro level.

I base my argument on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork[5] in the resettlement site of Sadbhavna Nagar ("Goodwill City"), located in the industrial neighborhood of Vatva, twelve kilometers from the Sabarmati Riverfront. Sadbhavna Nagar was built in 2009 under Basic Services to the Urban Poor (BSUP), a component of the Indian government's JnNURM scheme. The first apartments were allotted in February 2010 (Desai 2014, 54). During my fieldwork in 2015–2016, Sadbhavna Nagar accommodated ex-slum-dwellers displaced by the SRDP, the KLDP, and the BRTS. Residents belonged to various regional, religious, and caste groups including Bhois, Devipujaks, Marathis,

Marwaris, Muslims, Sindhis, and Vaghris.[6] Being a Hindu-majority area, Sadbhavna Nagar was colloquially known as Hindustan. This was in distinction to the adjacent all-Muslim resettlement site of Vasant Gajendra Gadkar Nagar, informally known as Pakistan. Due to the Hindu-Muslim co-presence, and the fact that the residents were former slum-dwellers, resettlement sites in Vatva had a bad reputation in other parts of Ahmedabad—they were considered to be a dangerous no-go zone and referred to as a "slum area."

The emergence of the notion of "world-class" as a rallying point can be traced back to the economic liberalization of India in the early 1990s. Since then, Indian cities have become key arenas in the pursuit of controlling the circuits of global capital. In order to attract investments, state and city governments engage in a competition to advertise and redesign "financially, infrastructurally, and visually appealing" world-class cities (Batra 2008). Closely linked with national pride (Rao et al. 2010), the catchword "world-class" has become an effective political tool for city elites, state agencies, and corporate actors in their efforts to secure an endorsement for refashioning urban landscapes (Baviskar 2014, 138). The construction of luxury malls, multiplex movie theaters, rapid transit systems, sports stadiums, and flyover bridges redefines the nation's image as dynamic and globally competitive but also entails displacement for the urban poor in the form of slum demolitions, the eviction of hawkers, and the commercialization of public space (e.g., Batra 2008; Baviskar 2009; Bhan 2016; Boano, Lamarca, and Hunter 2011).

Asher Ghertner (2011) posits that aesthetic norms play an increasingly important part in defining who gets to belong to the world-class city and on what terms. Ghertner's (2011; 2015) notion of a "world-class aesthetic" aptly captures the political rationality according to which a clean, slum-free city accelerates economic growth, boosts tourism, and increases the quality of life. Further, this rationality shapes the contours of belonging and citizenship, encouraging the emergence of world-class citizens that fit in the restructured landscape (Brosius 2010; Ghertner 2011). The rationality of the world-class aesthetic is disseminated in the form of discursive practices such as bourgeois "nuisance talk"—depictions of slums as "zones of incivility that violate normalized codes of urban conduct and

appearance" (Ghertner 2012, 1162)—in representations of slum-dwellers as "encroachers" (Bhan 2016) and as agents of environmental degradation (Baviskar 2003), and in middle-class activists' definitions of citizens as being distinct from hawkers and other marginal groups (Anjaria 2009). It is also manifested materially in the form of demolitions of settlements deemed illegal based on certain visual markers (Ghertner 2011; 2015), in crowding the urban poor into "plebeianized" spaces (Chatterjee 2014), and in the vast spaciousness, the grey simplicity, and the geometrically clean lines of the new urban spaces.

I locate my paper in the recent anthropological discussion of subaltern claim-making in the aftermath of urban restructuring in India (e.g., Ghertner 2015; Johnston 2014; Ramakrishnan 2014; Rao 2016). I pay particular attention to how the disenfranchised urban dwellers mobilize the world-class aesthetic to deal with the perceived betrayal by the state. As I will show, their mobilizations can have untoward consequences for inequality in the city.

Urban restructuring in Ahmedabad

On India's 66th Independence Day in 2012, Narendra Modi, then Chief Minister of Gujarat, gave a speech at the Sabarmati Riverfront dedicating the newly built riverfront promenade to the residents of Ahmedabad. "Before the face-lift, the Sabarmati Riverfront area was a living place for many slum-dwellers," Modi declared, leaving unmentioned the fact that the area also hosted a popular market and a thriving cloth dyeing industry. "There were thousands of shanties in the area and it had become a den for several illegal activities. Relocation had to be carried out to make the riverfront what it is today." Modi went on to criticize the rival party, the Indian National Congress (INC),[7] for putting spokes in the wheels of the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project, and pointed out that the project had even won a HUDCO[8] award for providing housing and rehabilitation facilities for the displaced. "Friends, imagine our plight! We decided to provide flats for the people residing in slums but still had to go to court!" stated Modi, ridiculing the INC's as well as the slum-dwellers' legal opposition to the project. The speech was met with a round of vigorous applause from the audience and, finally, the crowd

shouted in unison: *Bhārat mātā kī jay! Vande mātaram!* (Victory to Mother India! I praise thee, Mother!) (Modi 2012). Less than two years later, Narendra Modi, a leader of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was elected Prime Minister of India.

In 1997, the AMC established a specific public body, the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Corporation Limited (SRFDCL), for the supervision of the riverfront development project (Desai 2012b). The aim of the project was "to transform Ahmedabad's historic yet neglected river into a vibrant and vital focus for the city" (Sabarmati Riverfront 2013). Narendra Modi played a central part in the project as he held power over the appointment of bureaucrats to the SRFDCL's Board of Directors (Desai 2012b). The riverfront project officially displaced approximately 14,000 slum households directly and indirectly (Mathur 2012). By 2012, about 11,000 people had been resettled into concrete apartment blocks built under the BSUP (Mahadevia, Desai, and Vyas 2014). A majority of the apartments were allotted on the basis of a random drawing of lots, breaking apart the existing social networks of slums and creating new, often unwilling neighbors in the urban margins. However, Hindus and Muslims were mostly resettled into separate sites due to Ahmedabad's tumultuous history of communal violence (Desai 2012b; Desai 2014; Patel, Sliuzas, and Mathur 2015).

Today, the new Sabarmati Riverfront is strongly personified around the figure of Prime Minister Modi, who enjoys immense popularity in Ahmedabad.[9] Other notable development initiatives associated with him include the KLDP and the construction of the BRTS. The beautification of Kankaria, an artificial lake built by Sultan Qutb-ud-din in the fifteenth century, was initiated in 2006. During 2006–2007, the Kankaria Lakefront Development Project displaced around 2,000 households from four neighborhoods around the lake. The project also evicted marginal vendors, since only licensed vendors were allowed to set up kiosks inside the new gated area (Mahadevia, Desai, and Vyas 2014). According to the official project website, the AMC has developed Kankaria into a "modern urban space with best in class entertainment facilities." This, further, "truly represents Ahmedabad city government aim to elevate services to international class and transcend into the modern lifestyle" (Kankaria Lakefront 2015). With massive gates, security guards, and entrance fees, Kankaria—

traditionally a public space open for all—has been transformed into an exclusive area, out of reach for the poorest city dwellers. A zoo, a small train, motorboat rides, and hot-air balloon flights ensure that demanding visitors are entertained. Moreover, a new BRTS station by the lake makes these recreational facilities in the eastern part of the city more accessible for the middle classes coming from the affluent west side of Ahmedabad.

The decision to construct a BRTS bus network, branded locally as Janmarg ("People's Way"), was made by the AMC in 2005 (Datey et al. 2012). Janmarg was modeled after Bogotá's TransMilenio, with dedicated median bus lanes and closed corridors (Mahadevia, Joshi, and Datey 2013). The project was highly publicized, and it aspired to remove the negative image associated with the bus system in India. According to Mahadevia, Joshi, and Datey (2013, 59), "The Janmarg team has remained conscious about the branding and social marketing of the project, especially among the vocal middle classes who mainly drive private vehicles. This also fits into the larger politics of the state government of showcasing 'development' in the city and giving all its credit to the incumbent chief minister." The construction of the bus network started in 2007 and required the widening of roads, which, for its part, entailed the demolition of houses and the displacement of hawkers along the BRTS corridor. At least 1,000 people were displaced (Mahadevia, Desai, and Vyas 2014).

Of the displaced, those in possession of state-approved identification documents and proof of residence were to be resettled in BSUP sites, together with people displaced by other development projects in the city. Significantly, the process of resettlement was different for people displaced under different development projects and in different phases as no citywide resettlement policy existed. Eligibility criteria for resettlement also varied: in some cases, 1976 was used as a cut-off date for eligibility, while in others the cut-off date was 2011 (Mahadevia, Desai, and Vyas 2014). The absence of a unified resettlement policy has put the displaced people in unequal positions: thousands have been forcibly displaced without the possibility of resettlement. Moreover, as Patel, Sliuzas, and Mathur (2015, 13) point out, not all the people who were allotted apartments possessed eligibility documents. The

discriminatory, inconsistent practices have given rise to doubts of corruption among the resettled people and aggravated their feelings of unfair treatment by the state.

"Thrown into the jungle": Discourses of betrayal

Early one morning in October 2015, I was sitting in an auto rickshaw next to Meena, a middle-aged Vaghri woman who lived in Sadbhavna Nagar. Meena sold flower garlands every morning from four to ten am on the pavement next to the Jamalpur flower market by the Sabarmati river. That morning, my husband and I got out of bed at three am and walked to Meena's. At around 3:30 we had already crammed ourselves into the backseat of a rusty, flower-laden auto rickshaw together with Meena and were driving toward the city center. Meena's teenage daughter sat in the front with the driver, who seemed to enjoy speeding along a desolate BRTS lane usually occupied by honking buses. To his dismay, however, two idle-looking police officers spotted our fragrant vehicle and directed us to stop, waving their lathis. The khaki-clad police officers told us that our rickshaw was overcrowded but that they would be kind enough to overlook this minor offense if we agreed to pay a *hafta* (bribe) of twenty rupees. Our young driver handed over two wrinkled ten-rupee notes without making any objections, and the journey continued. About fifteen minutes later, we arrived by the river and unpacked the load on the ground. Customers seeking bright-colored roses, marigolds, and jasmines for the city's numerous temples were soon to arrive.

As I sat by the river in the darkness, waiting for customers and sipping tea with Meenaben, she began to speak of how she used to live just next to where we were sitting. "Modi wanted to make a *mega city*, and that's why we were thrown into Vatva," she explained. "I don't like it, but what can I do?" Meenaben's choice of words—"mega city" and "thrown"—struck a chord with me. Moreover, I found it interesting that the person said to be performing the treacherous act of "throwing" (*phemkna*) in Meenaben's account was none other than Prime Minister Narendra Modi. What can Meenaben's choice of words reveal about how she regards the state and her place in the world-class city?

The metaphors of a "jungle" and being "thrown" were commonly used by the residents of Sadbhavna Nagar. Ramakrishnan (2014) has studied the use of these tropes in Bawana, a resettlement site in Delhi, and calls them "metaphors of marginalization," which relate to how people make sense of their dispossession and negotiate their relationships with the state. The mobilization of a metaphor is a political act; a truth claim that encourages certain thoughts and actions while constraining others (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Cresswell 1997). In other words, metaphors construct the reality that they describe. The metaphor of being "thrown," for example, "serves to embed the notion of a second-class citizenship, both in the exclusion from urban dwelling and in the abject treatment by the state" (Ramakrishnan 2014, 769). In interviews, my research participants described how either the government (*sarkār*) or Modi had thrown them into a "jungle" (*jangal*), a "village" (*gām* or *gāmv*) or a "dirty settlement"/"slum" (*gandi basti*) (Tarlo 2003; Jervis Read 2012). In their accounts, the Modi-led state manifested itself as an indifferent or even hostile state that "throws away."

In a departure from Ramakrishnan's (2014) interviewees in Delhi, residents of Sadbhavna Nagar often attributed the act of throwing to an individual actor: Narendra Modi. The feeling of having been betrayed by Modi in particular speaks to the authority he holds in the eyes of resettled people—Modi was able to betray them precisely because he had the power to evoke dreams of improved living conditions and a better future. Poonamben—Vaghri or Devipujak by caste—criticized Modi for "running away to Delhi," and for enjoying his life by traveling all around the world while the poor people of Gujarat had been unfairly left to fend for themselves:

> At first, Modi was here, and he was the Chief Minister in Gandhinagar [Gujarat's capital]. Then he became the Prime Minister in Delhi... Now he is visiting new countries and enjoying his life, but what's the use? He never understood the problems of the poor. He got a fine chair and ran away. Anandiben [Patel, the Chief Minister of Gujarat from May 2014 to August 2016] visits rural areas for development purposes... Why are they not developing urban areas? They are only building bridges... That kind of work. Then they just dumped us here like dogs. No one listens [to us].

Poonamben's equation of slum-dwellers with dogs is noteworthy: stray dogs are a nuisance and a huge health problem in India, and are therefore often subject to violence. Her account emphasizes the

experiences of helplessness and powerlessness in the face of the local government's demolition drive and the following resettlement process, but it also resists facile interpretations of the displaced as being passive victims. Poonamben's critique of Modi's foreign travels and the characterization of urban development in Ahmedabad as "only building bridges" implies a deep dissatisfaction with the current neoliberal order where image, efficiency, and world-class infrastructure come before the well-being of the poor. Development is visible and tangible in the new clean and green spaces, but it does not bring positive material benefits to the everyday lives of the urban poor. The physical realities of their own lives exist in stark contrast to the world-class spaces of the city center (Desai and Roy 2016). Like the 3D holographic projection used by Modi in his 2014 election campaign, the local government's official success story was starting to look like an illusion—an enticing utopia hovering in the distance, but frustratingly out of reach for the poor.

In my interviews, resettled people's accounts were infused by traces of anxiety, anger, and a feeling of having been betrayed by their officials. Many of my interviewees from the riverfront recounted how Modi, the government, or—in some instances, an elusive "they" (Read 2012)—had originally promised to allot apartments within two to five kilometers' radius, but had deceived them in this promise. Achalbhai, a thirty-five-year-old bangle salesman whose parents had moved to Ahmedabad from the populous northern state of Uttar Pradesh, bore a grudge over having been sent "15 kilometers away":

> They could have given us homes within two kilometers. They could have made a smaller riverfront and built some buildings nearby. But instead, they sent us 15 kilometers away. Initially, we were told that we would get a house within two kilometers.

Achalbhai's misconception of resettlement "within two kilometers" of the riverfront can be traced back to the original project proposal by the Environmental Planning Collaborative (EPC), a non-profit urban planning firm. According to the proposal, 15.48 hectares of the reclaimed land by the riverfront was to be used for the relocation and rehabilitation of the slum-dwellers to ensure "that none of the project affected persons will have to move too far from their present location" (EPC 1998, 34).

Information about resettlement on the reclaimed land or in the municipal corporation's vacant plots was then reported in various newspapers, which, according to Desai (2014, 9), were the only sources of information for the riverfront dwellers. There was no attempt on the part of the AMC to engage them in the planning and implementation of the project (Desai 2014; Patel, Sliuzas, and Mathur 2015). Having read or heard about resettlement on the riverfront itself, and then later being denied this right, people felt purposefully excluded and betrayed by the state. As Meenaben said on that October early morning by the River Sabarmati: "Modi threw us into the jungle." For her, resettlement entailed not only diminished livelihood but also a sense of alienation, exclusion, and betrayal.

Silent maneuverings

Many of my research participants felt that the resettlement to Sadbhavna Nagar had deprived them of the benefits of development instead of making them beneficiaries. In April 2015, I interviewed Nehaben, a forty-five-year-old Sindhi housewife displaced from Kankaria Lake. She was very unhappy with the resettlement and did not hesitate to express her strong opinions about Modi, who had sent her from a "hi-fi area" to a "dirty locality":

> Jelena: What do you think about the government?
>
> Nehaben: My opinion is very negative [laughing]. My opinion on the government is very negative. Narendra Modi has annihilated us. He discarded us in such a place—listen—he discarded us in such a chemically polluted area that poor people are bound to die in it! Our Kankaria was a *hi-fi area*. It was a *hi-fi area*. He removed us from there and gave us houses five kilometers away in a dirty locality like this.

The feeling of having been betrayed by Modi and the government had also been translated into action, or, to perhaps put it more appropriately, into silent maneuvering or a refusal to cooperate. According to the allotment letters handed out by the municipal authority, the residents are supposed to pay their share of the house price, 67,860 rupees (ca. 953 USD), in installments over the course of ten years. After ten years, the property will be transferred into the beneficiary's name, if all the payments have been made. However, most of the residents that I talked to stated quite forcefully that they did

not intend to pay the government. At the time of my fieldwork, four to six years had passed since the allotment of the apartments, and the residents had only paid the initial deposit of 3,000 to 8,000 rupees (ca. 43–112 USD) to receive apartment keys. This sum, in their view, was more than enough. People felt that they were entitled to get "a house for a house," since their previous dwellings had been forcefully demolished. As Nehaben exclaimed:

> When he broke our houses, Narendra Modi, our house was there [in Kankaria], it was worth *lākhs* [hundreds of thousands] of rupees. And the land was worth *karōrs* [tens of millions] of rupees. He removed us from there. Now, then, why should we have to pay for this house?

Like Nehaben, my interviewees considered the allotted flats merely to be compensation for the demolished houses rather than a manifestation of the government's goodwill—providing resettlement housing was the least that the government could do for the poor after depriving them of their prime location homes. Moreover, many people of Sadbhavna Nagar had started modifying their houses, contrary to Rule 12 laid down by the municipal corporation in the allotment letters: "The beneficiary should keep the allocated building as it is at present. All maintenance charges will be paid by the beneficiary. No changes should be made to the building."[10] In Sadbhavna Nagar, hallways were turned into storage rooms, empty dwelling units into animal sheds, and common plots into outdoor kitchens and private backyards. The inner and outer walls of apartments were painted with pastel pinks, greens, and blues, and grilles were installed on the balconies, all in violation of policy guidelines. Through these material modifications, people strived to turn their homogenous apartments into homes through which to express personal identity (cf. Koster and Nuijten 2012). Also, those who had the financial means had moved out of the resettlement site, illegally selling or subletting their allotted apartment to relatives or acquaintances. Due to this, residents of Sadbhavna Nagar also included seasonal workers, beggars, illegal migrants, and other marginalized people who did not have the means to access the legal housing market.

Resettled people's material modifications, their practices of selling and subletting, as well as their refusal to pay for the apartments, can be described using Bayat's (2013) notion of "quiet

encroachment." Bayat (2013, 46) defines quiet encroachment as the "silent, protracted but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied, powerful, or the public in order to survive and improve their lives." This type of subaltern politics is largely individual, often invisible action that does not constitute a social movement or advance at the cost of other poor people (Bayat 2013). While the silent maneuverings of residents of Sadbhavna Nagar were not collective political acts but rather acts driven by individual needs and the will to survive, they were, nevertheless, collectively defended. People would, for example, inform each other of officers that turned up unexpectedly to check if the apartments had been illegally sold or rented out. There seemed to be a collective understanding among the residents that what they were doing was moral and justified. As Bayat (2013, 48) states: "A key attribute of quiet encroachment is that while advances are made quietly, individually, and gradually, the defense of their gains is often, although not always, collective and audible." Through silent maneuverings, people subjected to betrayal cleverly responded to the perceived exclusion from the city, asserting their material right to make their future in the city.

Bayat (2013) also acknowledges the possibility of the individual tactics of the subaltern to develop into public political action. The acts described in this paper have, indeed, the potential to transform into a public confrontation in case the AMC tries to evict the residents on the grounds that they refuse to pay their installments. Silent maneuverings, thus, contain a seed of a radical social movement. Further research is needed to find out what happens after ten years have passed since the allocation of houses, and the residents are supposed to have paid their share of the house price.

Modi, development, and the empowering utopia

> Development is at the core of our governance. It is the solution to all problems. It is the way ahead to a dignified life. Development should be sustainable. It must serve as an opportunity for the poor to empower themselves.
>
> Narendra Modi at the laying of the Foundation Stone of the Chattrapati Shivaji Maharaj memorial in Mumbai (Modi 2016)

The Hindu nationalist BJP has managed to position itself as a party of development and progress—the party of the future. This has enabled it to appeal to the urban middle-class electorate without divorcing itself from the interests of lower-caste and Muslim constituencies. As Desai and Roy (2016, 1) point out, "The BJP has been particularly effective in linking ideas of development to mundane concerns about security, identity and spatial order." This linkage was also present in resettled peoples', especially Hindus', opinions of Modi and the BJP-led government. The same people that blamed Modi for their unfavorable resettlement also admired and even praised him for bringing law and order to Gujarat, and for developing Ahmedabad into a clean mega city with world-class facilities.

My Hindu interviewees commonly expressed discontent with displacement while supporting the world-class city project in general, as it was considered both a spatial manifestation of, and a means to development. For example, when I asked Pradeepbhai, a seventy-year-old retired gardener, what he thought about the new Kankaria Lakefront, he replied: "Earlier there was no infrastructure around the lake. After Modi, so many things have improved: rides, sitting spaces… and a hot-air balloon for flying. Even visually Kankaria is stunning." Praadepbhai's wife, Preetiben, agreed with her husband, praising Modi for building new roads after slum demolitions and for "helping the poor." Pradeepbhai added: "People were thrown very far away, but Modi has done a good job." Nevertheless, Pradeepbhai and Preetiben both felt that resettlement had not brought any positive changes to their own lives—on the contrary, it had caused difficulties in the form of increased expenses. Besides, even though they thought that the new house was "good," they would have still preferred to live in their provisional (*kacca*) hut by Kankaria Lake, "in the *city*."

Why then did Preetiben say that Modi has helped the poor? Instead of blaming Modi for displacement, the couple spoke very highly of him and the tangible improvements he had made in the city. It seemed that in their view, slum demolitions were well justified because of the project's impressive result. I suggest that Pradeepbhai and Preetiben had internalized the world-class aesthetic discourse that regards slum removal as necessary for the development of the city and contributing to the greater good (Ghertner 2012, 1181; Berman 1983). This supports Rao's (2016, 78) recent

contention that the poor, too, aspire for green and clean cities—the world-class city is not only the desire of the elite and the middle classes, or the result of the top-down implementation of policy. Pradeepbhai and Preetiben were trying to convince themselves of the project's profitability for the poor and, in so doing, to hold on to the image of Modi as a generous benefactor. Pradeepbhai used the passive voice—"people were thrown very far away"—to avoid stating who had performed the act of betrayal.

Yasminben, a Muslim housewife in her thirties, had been displaced from the Sabarmati Riverfront. When I asked her about what had happened there, she described how "they cleaned the place [by the river] and threw us in a *camp*." By "camp" she was referring to the "interim resettlement site" of Ganeshnagar, next to the city's garbage dump, where her family was forced to spend around six months in a hut before they were allotted a flat in Sadbhavna Nagar. Yasminben's choice of words is noteworthy: when she said that the riverfront had been "cleaned," she, in fact, likened the slums to dirt that has been physically removed in order to make space for something else. In other words, she conceived of her own home through the world-class aesthetic.

The description given by Vimalben, a Hindu woman in her thirties, also utilized the story of how urban development contributes to the "greater good." According to Vimalben, the new riverfront was a "good thing" (*acchī bāt*) in general, but it did not serve "people like us." In Vimalben's view, the new riverfront had been built to cater to the needs of foreigners. As she said, "I don't like it. But it's good; it's good for you [foreign people]." Hence, displacement and resettlement appeared as unfortunate, albeit necessary, measures taken on the way to attaining the greater good: the world-class city as a symbol and a medium of a globally recognized, developed Ahmedabad.

The ambivalent discourses of resettled people indicate that they were very conscious of the growing gap between the world-class image and their material reality. By using the passive voice and the third-person plural pronoun, my informants clung to the empowering utopia personified in the figure of Modi, striving to hide its dystopian shadow. Hence, I suggest that while the making of the world-class city in Ahmedabad displaces the urban poor, it can, nevertheless, change their understanding of

themselves and strengthen their "capacity to aspire" (Appadurai 2004) by expanding the horizons of possible futures. In other words, the world-class city can be empowering by offering a material base in which to anchor one's dreams. The proximity of the world-class city with its grandiloquent, "foreign-looking" urban design was a source of national pride, even for the excluded. In what follows, I will illustrate how people in Sadbhavna Nagar strategically distanced themselves from "backward" qualities and landscapes to lay claim to a world-class future.

"All the others are third-class citizens"

On a February Sunday in 2016, I was sitting in an auto rickshaw on my way to the launch of Esther David's new book *Ahmedabad: City with a Past,* being held at Crossword Bookstore in western Ahmedabad. I did not know the rickshaw driver, who was from Sadbhavna Nagar. Along the way, we started chatting, and the driver mentioned that he did not like living in the resettlement site because of the "*low, third-class* people" that live there. Significantly, he said two of these words, "third-class" and "low," in English even though the rest of our conversation was in Hindi. I asked him if he knew some English, considering that he used those words. The driver seemed puzzled and answered: "No, no. Those are Gujarati words, very common Gujarati words." "Fair enough," I thought, and enquired what he meant by the term "third-class." He replied that the word refers to people who use impolite language, pick fights, drink liquor, steal things, throw their garbage from their windows instead of using a garbage can, and try to haggle the price of auto rickshaw rides. My new acquaintance went on to say that he prefers to socialize with *acche insān* (good people) who talk politely and pay according to the meter rate. "Well," I said, looking for the right words, "I think you can find many good people in Sadbhavna Nagar, don't you think?" He disagreed and continued to say that good people are only found in the posh western neighborhoods of Satellite, Bopal, and Vastrapur. That is precisely the reason why he prefers to drive his rickshaw there instead of in the eastern part of the city, which he regarded as the abode of "low people."

The terms that the driver used—"third-class" and "low"—are the same negative remarks that people from the neighboring middle-class area in Vatva use to characterize all the residents of the resettlement sites. In the manner of the driver, many of my interviewees expressed their wish to live in a "good, clean locality" or "in the *city* with good people," not in a "slum" with "useless people" (*bekār log*) or "third-class people." Instead of collectively contesting the middle-class nuisance talk, resettled slum-dwellers mirrored defaming representations and, thus, conflated urban citizenship with norms of consumerism and civility like the bourgeois. This is a strategic effort to distance oneself from "uncivil" or "backward" qualities of loudness, dirtiness, violence, illegality, and, ultimately, poverty, and to locate oneself on the side of development, on the side of good citizens who fit in the beautiful, clean spaces. However, mobilizing nuisance talk against each other, resettled people end up betraying their peers.

Derogatory remarks along the lines of caste, religion or locality were often deployed. Upper-caste Hindus in particular had the habit of attributing littering, "bad language," and the use of alcohol and drugs to the low-caste Vaghri and Devipujak communities. A young housewife, Nidhaben, for example, said that people in her block, all of whom were Hindus, were all right, but "all the others are third-class people" (*bākī sab third-class log hai*). When I asked what "third-class" meant for her, she answered that "those people keep on drinking and fighting." In a puzzling manner, she later told me that her father-in-law was also a big drinker and a frequent quarreler, but this did not make him "third-class." It is clear then that "third-class" was not only a form of class positioning but also entailed implicit assumptions about caste (Frøystad 2006). Caste and class became enmeshed in derogatory comments employed by Sindhis and other upper-caste residents of Sabhavna Nagar.

I usually asked residents what kinds of changes they would like to see in the area. A standard answer was that different social groups should be allotted separate areas. Kalpeshbhai, a Sindhi man in his forties, put it bluntly: "All the Vaghris should go." According to him, Vaghris "don't hesitate to fight or even hit someone with a knife." Tejalben, a homemaker native to Rajasthan, shared Kalpeshbhai's opinion. In her view, "lower castes" should be separated from others in order to reduce fights: "Separate places should be given so that there would be no fights. And then all these lower

castes, Vaghri... All those lower castes (*nīchī jāti*) fight a lot, and for that reason, those people, too, should be given a separate place."

In addition to Vaghris and Devipujaks, Muslims were also frequently spoken of as "low people," not only by Sindhis but by other Hindu communities as well. Moreover, as I have shown above, Muslim-dominated areas were commonly referred to as Pakistan and regarded as dangerous areas. The use of the term Pakistan, specifically, to characterize the living areas of the Muslim minority is a practice that Shaban (2012) has previously referred to using the term "deterritorialization." The Muslims of Sadbhavna Nagar were forced to bear the additional burden of deterritorialization from the metaphorical national space—they were not only "low people" but also "dangerous Pakistanis," the doubly other, who have no place in the new, developed India. Muslims themselves tended to downplay the Hindu–Muslim segregation, emphasizing how "all are equal," or how "everyone shares the same red blood," attributing uncivil and immoral practices to people coming from different slums irrespective of their religion.

Conclusions: The trail of betrayal

The world-class city reflects the purity of the future-to-be invoking dreams, desires, and aspirations in urban dwellers. Not just the elites and the middle classes, but the poor, too, want to be included in the world-class city and the progress, development, and bright future that it promises. In this paper, I have shown how world-class city interventions and imaginaries in contemporary Ahmedabad resulted in a sense of betrayal among the urban poor, who were both spatially and discursively excluded from development. People displaced by large-scale urban redevelopment felt betrayed by the state, and especially by Prime Minister Modi, whom they saw as the embodiment of a globally recognized, developed India that strongly resonated with their values and aspirations. My informants fiercely criticized Modi and the government for "throwing" them into the "jungle," for excluding them from the world-class city. Their everyday lives in this jungle, among unwanted neighbors, constituted a stark

contradiction to the spectacular futurism of the world-class city and aggravated their sense of having been betrayed—for them, the promised future never arrived. The everyday socio-materiality in the urban margins constantly reminded them of their relegated "third-class" status in the world-class city.

However, rather than accepting their marginal position, resettled people espoused ideas of civility, morality, and cleanliness in an effort to claim belonging, public recognition, and a positive self-understanding. To counter the perceived exclusion from the world-class city, my informants used the tropes of third-class people and low people, influenced by middle-class nuisance talk (Ghertner 2012), to characterize their new, unwanted neighbors that belonged to different religious, caste- and locality-based groups. The ubiquitous practices of othering prevented the formation of horizontal solidarity among the urban poor.

Finally, people's discursive practices of denigration manifest in how betrayal by the state trickles down and comes to reinforce the pre-existing inequalities of caste and religion at the micro level. Following the trail of betrayal, I have shown that Muslims and low-caste Hindus living in marginal spaces were positioned at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the world-class city. These communities were not only betrayed by the state but also by their neighbors aspiring for social mobility.

Notes

[1] Parts of this article have been previously published as "Differentiated Citizenship, Displacement, and Materiality in State–Citizen Relations in Ahmedabad." PhD Thesis. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.
[2] English words used in what were otherwise Hindi sentences before translation into English are italicized when they appear in the text for the first time.
[3] All the names of interviewees are pseudonyms.
[4] As Mahadevia (2007) notes, the city of Ahmedabad has a long history of Hindu–Muslim tensions and each incident of inter-community violence has led to an increased level of intra-city migration. In 2002 Hindu–Muslim violence reached an unprecedented level; during the riots of March–May 2002, two thousand Muslims were killed and 200,000 had to flee from their homes in the aftermath of the Sabarmati Express train-burning incident. The train was carrying Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya and it was reported to have been attacked and set alight by Muslims. The government of Gujarat, especially Narendra Modi and the BJP have been accused of an inability to control the violent outbursts following the train burning. The National Human Rights Commission has posited that there was state government conformity and even direct participation in the targeted, selective violence against Muslims (Mahadevia 2007).
[5] During my fieldwork, I lived in a middle-class housing estate located right next to the resettlement site, which enabled me to socialize with residents of Sadbhavna Nagar on a daily basis. Our interaction varied from casual afternoon tea breaks to detailed interviews, from all-night *garba* dance parties to visits to people's workplaces. The data of this paper consists of informal discussions, observations of everyday activities (recorded in the form of field notes and photographs), and 51 semi-structured interviews with residents of Sadbhavna Nagar (33 with Hindus, 17 with Muslims, one with both Hindu and Muslim residents). Some of the interviews were one-on-one encounters, while others took the form of group discussions. All the interviews were conducted in Hindi/Urdu, which was either the mother tongue or the second language of the interviewees.
[6] Sindhis considered themselves to be the highest-ranking caste in the area. Sindhis of Sadbhavna Nagar were the offspring of refugees displaced from the Sindh province during the Partition of British India in 1947. In Ahmedabad, they were rehabilitated in refugee camps, one of which was set on private land next to Kankaria Lake. Sindhi presence was clearly visible in the resettlement site as the Sindhis had collectively constructed a temple dedicated to their community god, Jhūlelāl. Economically, too, the Sindhis were relatively well-off, many men having a regular job in the textile industry or as auto rickshaw drivers. Vaghris and Devipujaks, for their part, were regarded as the lowest Hindu castes in Sadbhavna Nagar. They often worked as informal hawkers and vendors selling flowers, vegetables, and fruit. Vaghris had been resettled to Sadbhavna Nagar from various neighborhoods by the Sabarmati River and Kankaria Lake while Devipujaks had lived by the Sabarmati. Of all the Hindu castes, Sindhis and Vaghris were the most numerous.
[7] The INC, commonly known as Congress, is one of the two major political parties in India. The party lost much of its support in the general elections of 2014.
[8] The Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) is a government-owned corporation under the administrative control of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation.
[9] In the Indian general elections of 2014, the Hindu nationalist BJP, led by Modi, won all the 26 parliamentary seats in Gujarat, and in the municipal elections of 2015, the BJP won 142 out of 192 seats in Ahmedabad.
[10] The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation: allocation letter received by a former resident of Kankaria dated 28 March, 2011.

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